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THE BIG STICK SPLIT IN TWO:
ROOSEVELT VS. HAY ON
THE ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP

William Shirey

In 1895, the United States and Great Britain found themselves in a state of crisis over a British intervention in Venezuela that had been sparked by a disagreement over the Venezuela-British Guiana border. Most American political elites sought to solve the issue by arbitration; many academic elites wished for their government to be as conciliatory as possible. During the crisis, a half-cowboy-half-politician named Theodore Roosevelt, then a candidate for the New York City mayoralty, wrote a letter to his alma mater's newspaper stating his thoughts on the international debate in no uncertain terms: there was no time now, Roosevelt declared, for "stock-jobbing timidity" or "the Baboo kind of statesmanship," nor was there any time for those who were "still intellectually in a state of colonial dependence on England." The United States, according to Roosevelt, should insist upon the Monroe Doctrine in its fullest application, and, for good measure, "build a really first-class Navy."¹ Yet according to most historians, within two decades, Theodore Roosevelt had played a significant if not determinative role in laying the foundation for the Anglo-American "special relationship" that carried the two nations through the world wars.

Frederick W. Marks III, in his 1979 book *Velvet on Iron: The Diplomacy of Theodore Roosevelt*, posits that "[Roosevelt] liquidated virtually every object of discord between the two countries and would probably have sought a more formal tie had he not feared the veto power of German and Irish-American voters." Marks argues that Roosevelt's seemingly cool attitude toward Britain was concealing his true desire, Anglo-American partnership, for the sake of political prudence in a largely Anglophobic country.²

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The main scholar of Theodore Roosevelt's relationship with Great Britain, William N. Tilchin, argues that Roosevelt combined his own bombastic nationalism with a pro-British attitude, a sentiment he held because of the cultural affinities between American and British societies as well as his cherished relationships with British statesmen such as Cecil Spring-Rice, the best man at his second wedding. Tilchin writes that, from his grand geostrategic considerations down to his handling of minor details, Roosevelt played a pivotal role in nurturing Anglo-American relations.³

Howard K. Beale, the deliverer of a prolific set of lectures on Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy at Johns Hopkins University and the author of perhaps the most-cited work on the subject, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*, argues that Roosevelt and his ardent companion Henry Cabot Lodge were indeed cold (if not somewhat hostile) toward the British in the early 1890s, but grew friendlier as their careers progressed. This friendliness grew, his narrative goes, after the Spanish-American War, when Britain refrained from censuring America like the other European powers.⁴ After describing Roosevelt's fury toward Britain's aforementioned incursion upon the Monroe Doctrine in Venezuela, Beale posits that by 1898 Roosevelt had "developed a full-blown foreign policy based on the belief that the British and Americans shared common interests."⁵ Beale propounds a view of Roosevelt's actions toward Great Britain that he dubbed "the cementing of an Anglo-American entente"; in other words, Roosevelt helped consummate an informal but mutually understood relationship of diplomatic solidarity with Britain. His analysis is colored by the fact that Roosevelt "played England's game" in the conferences and diplomatic skirmishes that led to the First World War.⁶

Scarce dissent is to be found on Theodore Roosevelt's general affinity for England and his playing a major role in the building of the Anglo-American entente. Indeed, England and America began to deliberately form a friendly diplomatic

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relationship beginning, at the latest estimate, in 1900, when Lord Lansdowne became the British secretary of state for foreign affairs.⁷ Furthermore, it is plain that Roosevelt had a respect for the affinities between American and British culture and that he had dear British friends in important diplomatic roles.

But the trend from wariness to entente in British-American relations was more a British phenomenon than an American one; the respect that Roosevelt found for British culture was not meaningfully different from the respect that he found for other nations as disparate as Russia, Germany, and Japan. Similarly, though Roosevelt's greatest foreign friends were indeed British, he surrounded himself with an international coterie of Englishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, Japanese, and Russians with whom he shared an immense mutual fondness.⁸ Yet one must go back to 1957 in order to find a historian who credits the strengthening of the bonds between England and America not to Theodore Roosevelt himself, but to people like John Hay, Lord Pauncefote, Henry White, or the general foreign policy establishments of England and America, or even to the mutual enmity toward Germany from both countries.⁹

The historical facts, upon closer examination, cast the general conclusion of historians like Marks, Tilchin, Beale, and others in a suspicious light. Historical episodes involving both the United States and Britain reveal that Roosevelt was, even after 1898, often blatantly anti-British, while in fact *other* Republican actors worked to pacify Washington's dealings with London. The general historical consensus thus fails to recognize that a diplomatic and political corps whose ideologies and affinities differed from Roosevelt's levied a crucial influence on the actual comportment of his administration. In addition to obscuring the importance of other Republican policymakers, the historical consensus regarding Roosevelt's foreign policy interprets his actions anachronistically through the screen of the world wars, attempting either to ascribe to him a foresight that he did not possess, or to fit him into a facile teleology of America's

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seemingly inexorable entente with Britain while ignoring the contingencies of that relationship. No history has adequately explained Roosevelt's role in Anglo-American relations without falling into these traps of faulty historical reasoning.¹⁰

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

BRITAIN, EUROPE, AND THE UNITED STATES

Britain, from at least the termination of her disastrous effort in the Second Boer War, had been in need of a new geopolitical approach. Before the imperial boom of the 1870s and 1880s, only Britain had anything more than a toehold in the wider world. Once the other European powers—save Austria-Hungary—crashed into Africa and Asia, Britain's comparative naval and financial advantage began to wither. In the late 1890s, the British fought their disastrously long war in southern Africa against the Boers for three years, seriously draining their resources and their morale; at the same time, Britain and France nearly collided on their imperial frontiers. Under Kaiser Wilhelm II and Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, Germany began the construction of a "risk fleet" to compete with the Royal Navy in the late 1890s, a clear threat against Britain's traditional dominance on the sea.

The British realized that the "splendid isolation"—in actuality, unilateralism—that they had practiced for decades was no longer viable in an increasingly multipolar world order. Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, the last great lion of British conservative statecraft and a staunch supporter of unilateralism, left office in 1902. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Lansdowne had been working since 1900 on broadening Britain's friendships and minimizing the number of her enemies, a task that became easier when Salisbury could impede him no longer. Although Lansdowne's attempted overtures to Berlin were fruitless, the British successfully formed a naval compact with Japan in 1902, an "entente cordiale" with France in 1904, and a triple entente

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with France and Russia in 1907.

Before all of this, however, Britain had made diplomatic overtures to the United States, even though many northern American statesmen—Senator Lodge foremost among them—publicly conveyed their detestation of both Britain’s antagonism toward American control of Hawaii and her stringent upholding of Canadian fishing rights. Nevertheless, the path to an unofficial Anglo-American entente was paved by Britain’s hostility toward Spain in 1898; the relationship was slowly brought to its consummation as Britain brought garrisons back from Canada. The British at this time were also beginning to negotiate over recognizing at least partial American rights to the future Isthmian canal—and was, therefore, tacitly toying with allowing full American dominance in the Western Hemisphere.

The diplomatic behavior of the United States was going through a set of changes at the turn of the century as well, perhaps even more profound changes than Lansdowne was to make in Britain. In 1898, the United States crashed onto the world scene in the Spanish-American War, taking the Philippines and other colonies. Roosevelt and his fellow “imperialist” Republicans such as Henry Cabot Lodge, John Hay, and—though he only influenced policy indirectly—the historian Alfred Thayer Mahan had been working their way up the ranks of the Washington elite during the preceding decade, and by the late 1890s they were influencing naval affairs, the State Department, and the Senate. These men developed what Henry Cabot Lodge called the “Large Policy,” meaning worldwide American assertion. The Large Policy finally found its way into the Oval Office when Theodore Roosevelt assumed the presidency after the assassination of William McKinley in 1901.

The expansions, different as they were, of both Britain and the United States throughout the globe were in part subtended by cultural assumptions of civilizational superiority. These assumptions were the product of both Enlightenment thought and retroactive justifications of colonial control and

displacement.¹¹ In the U.S., the Republican Party and progressive elites peddled imperial expansion in the lead-up to the Spanish-American War as synonymous with national honor; dominance in the Western Hemisphere became, therefore, an imperative for the sake of civilization and Christendom.¹² Furthermore, not only did the British end up ceding hemispheric dominance to the United States for pragmatic reasons during this period, but they also held the selfsame cultural assumptions that made it appear valid. That published works of fiction, philosophy, and social and political thought began to flow in sharply increased volume between the U.S. and her motherland during the dawning hours of joint Anglophone global dominance was no coincidence.¹³

England was reaching out for friends and allies at the same time that the United States began to seriously exert its power throughout the world; the friendship was, in a sense, natural. (German *Weltpolitik* had seemed always to stand athwart America's aims at expansion; by virtue of the Anglo-German naval race and general rivalry, then, British and American diplomatic goals of the late nineteenth century found a somewhat organic alignment.) The historiographical consensus is that Roosevelt played a positive role in bringing about this alignment, which facilitated Anglo-American cooperation during both world wars. Among major historians on the subject, Howard Beale has the most generous view on when Roosevelt began to seriously cooperate with the British. By 1898, Beale argues, Roosevelt was basing his foreign policy on the palpable necessity of the Anglo-American understanding.¹⁴

Yet Roosevelt, rather than favoring Britain categorically over Germany or other European powers, was far more erratic than historians have acknowledged. He was friendly toward the diplomats of Downing Street when Britain stood to advance American interests, but he could be shockingly pugnacious whenever Britain posed even a minimal threat to America's geopolitical goals. Besides the latent trend that made an Anglo-American understanding propitious at the turn of the century,

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it was Roosevelt's diplomatic corps, including his Anglophilic Secretary of State John Hay, that truly made an effort to build the Anglo-American relationship that came to define later decades. The clearest case of the tension between the rabid "pro-American" style of Roosevelt and the Anglophilia of Hay and the State Department—and the importance of the structural trend of Anglo-American friendship—can be seen in the Alaskan boundary dispute of the early 1900s.

HAY AND CHOATE IN CANADA

By the end of the nineteenth century, the spheres of both British Canada and the United States were growing; by the 1890s, they were bumping into each other. Roosevelt's "pro-Americanism" reached a fever pitch in the face of this ever-so-mild and indirect abrasion between America and the Imperial Parliament at Westminster, which controlled Canadian foreign affairs at the time. In 1895, two years after a dispute between the British and the Americans over fisheries in the Bering Sea had been resolved by arbitration, then-New York City Police Commissioner Roosevelt wrote to his friend Henry Cabot Lodge to say that "Great Britain's conduct about the seals is infamous... [we should] seize all Canadian sailors as pirates."¹⁵ Roosevelt also expressed his wish to invade Canada as punishment for Britain's half-violation of the Monroe Doctrine in Venezuela. In late 1895, he wrote: "Let the fight come if it must; I don't care whether our sea coast cities are bombarded or not; we would take Canada."¹⁶ (The Americans would most emphatically *not* have taken Canada; at the time of Roosevelt's letter, Great Britain had fifty available battleships in the northern Pacific to America's three).¹⁷

Canadian-American—and, by extension, British-American—friction ebbed after 1895. The British Admiralty continued to worry about both American and German naval ambitions in the North Pacific, but the Anglo-Japanese agreement of 1902 eventually diminished the fears.¹⁸ Downing

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Street recognized that, in the event of a war with the United States in the coming decades, British ships would ineluctably be batted away from Canada's Atlantic coast and the St. Lawrence by the up-and-coming United States, which had established its Naval War College in 1884 and come under the leadership of a fire-breathing naval advocate in Roosevelt. Aside from a small fleet of submarines, the British abandoned their military presence in the Western Hemisphere, preferring to count on diplomatic courtship of the Americans and the loyalty of the Canadians.¹⁹ Still, the tension between America's increasingly positive relations with Britain and America's increasingly strained relationship with British Canada was the dialectic that defined the Anglo-American understanding in its infant stages.

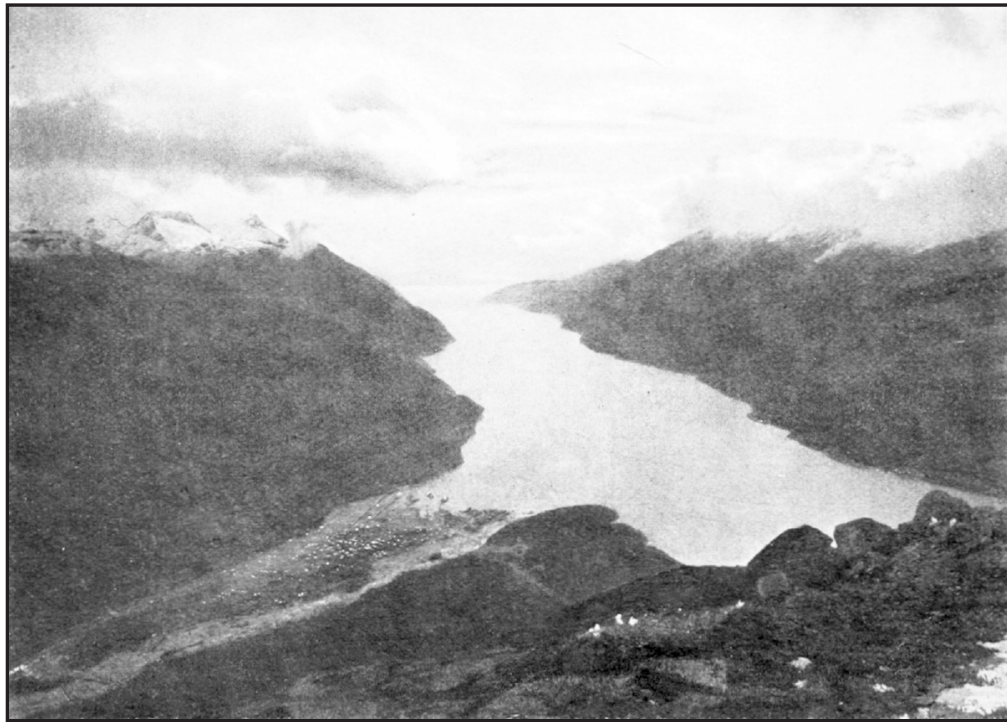
The year 1900 saw the beginning of the Alaskan boundary question. According to the 1825 treaty that demarcated the boundary between Alaska and Canada, the line of separation was to "follow the summit of the mountains parallel to the coast" north of the Portland Channel. Yet the language was far too vague to draw an actual line, and an exact boundary had not been established.²⁰ It is in fact unclear whether or not a mountain summit line parallel to the coast even exists. The treaty also included the phrase "winding of the coast" and referred to the "Portland channel" at points crucial for its own interpretation, neither of which is an obvious feature based on geography alone, and neither of which had been previously defined. The British/Canadians and the Americans each claimed two different lines that ran approximately northwest-southeast along the coast. Crucially, each side claimed control of a pass over the Lynn Canal, the key spot which controlled the headwaters and allowed for all riverboat transport in the area.²¹

When gold was discovered in the Yukon in the 1890s, the Canadians pressed their claim for territories that were left ambiguous by the treaty. In January 1900, the American ambassador to London, Joseph Choate, made it clear that the United States would agree to an arbitral tribunal on the matter.

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Lansdowne, wishing to be as conciliatory as possible toward the Americans while still keeping the Canadians happy, saw the question as an unnecessary roadblock to an entente.²² With discussions between London and Washington about the nature of the future Isthmian canal becoming more serious by the week, the Alaskan boundary dispute became a major bargaining chip for both sides. As it was the most emotionally charged issue dividing the British and the Americans and was tightly linked to the future of transportation, trade, and naval power in the Western Hemisphere, the topic of Alaska's boundary was the *sine qua non* of Anglo-American rapprochement.²³

Secretary of State John Hay sent a drafted proposal for the tribunal to Julian Pauncefote, envoy extraordinary and



The Lynn Canal and the Skagway River.

A gold discovery in the area would bring the United States and the British Empire into a pivotal near-confrontation.

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minister plenipotentiary to the United States. The British were initially surprised and satisfied, but Pauncefote reported that the judges would have very little interpretive power outside of the 1825 treaty, which was firmly in the United States' favor. Canada and Governor-General Minto were at first "delighted," but on further consideration of the precise terms, they considered the United States' proposal "most insidious."²⁴

Secretary Hay, as historians have noted and as was clear to his contemporaries, was willing and eager to bend U.S. policy in England's direction. "In sum," comments one Hay biographer, "under Hay's direction, American neutrality was distinctly benevolent to England."²⁵ In the Alaskan situation, however, an American interest was directly involved. Once Roosevelt was in office, Hay could not nakedly alter U.S. policy to favor England, even though (as will be shown) he disagreed with President Roosevelt's tacit idea that American claims in Alaska were more important than the prospective relationship between Washington and London.²⁶ His willingness to arrange an arbitration only served to put him on thin ice as secretary of state. As Roosevelt would recall after Hay's death, he was simply "not to be trusted on issues concerning England"—and, as an important corollary, he was "foolishly distrustful of the Germans."²⁷

Fortunately for the Americans, a canal treaty with England was in its final stages and Lansdowne was determined not to jeopardize it. Lansdowne's secretary wrote to his counterparts in the British Colonial Office that Lansdowne wished

that the communications to the Dominion Government should not in any way imply that His Majesty's Government associate the settlement of the Alaskan Boundary and other primarily Canadian questions with that of the Interoceanic Canal question, or that the negotiations for the... Treaties are interdependent.²⁸

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Lansdowne and Hay, therefore, were committed to an amicable resolution of the issue. It was Roosevelt who stood as an inhibitor of the trend toward conciliation.

HAY VS. ROOSEVELT IN CANADA

Canada already stood on shaky legal ground. That her mother country of England was unwilling to throw weight behind the Alaskan issue only worsened her hopeless situation. The British, as Canadian Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier knew, would frown upon any further obstructive tactics he used.²⁹ Thus Laurier, in January 1902, decided to arbitrate.³⁰ Hay and those at the British Foreign Office were delighted that this source of friction between Washington and London would soon be removed.

But the events of the previous September—the assassination of William McKinley and the inauguration of Theodore Roosevelt as president of the United States—had introduced a great deal of volatility into America's cooperation on the Alaskan issue. Roosevelt immediately made clear his opposition to any such arbitration as had been tentatively approved by the Canadians, the British, and Hay. In March 1902, a crestfallen Pauncefote told Lansdowne that “the President considers the claim of the United States is so manifestly clear and unanswerable that he is not disposed to run the risk of sacrificing American territory under a compromise that is the almost certain result of an arbitration.”³¹ Roosevelt, according to Henry Cabot Lodge, had posited in the presence of two senators that at the first sign of trouble in the disputed territory he would send United States troops to occupy it. One of the two senators intimated that this would be a popular decision among both members of Congress and the people.³²

Secretary of State Hay pushed the reluctant Joseph Choate to enter private discussions at the British Foreign Office despite Roosevelt's heated opposition toward anything

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resembling arbitration. Choate noted that the British and Canadians were indeed open to significant compromise. In August 1902, Lansdowne had suggested to Choate that the United States could even determine the format and style of an arbitration if it were to take place.³³ The significance of Hay's apparent dismissal of Roosevelt's hawkishness on this issue is often overlooked in the later historiography.³⁴

In September 1902, Lansdowne sent Sir Michael Herbert, a friend of Roosevelt's, to Washington as ambassador to the United States. Roosevelt gave him a warm reception but made it clear that he wished to move immediately ahead with the Alaskan issue. The president suggested, during his first interview with the new ambassador, that he might accept an Anglo-American jurist tribunal that carried no formal weight. Instead, it would be made up of jurists selected by the American and British governments. The Canadian government gave its tentative assent on November 18. Said the Governor-General of Canada, "My ministers would be disposed to consider it favorably, provided that the reference to a Tribunal should include all aspects of the question." Lansdowne told Hay that the British, too, would agree.³⁵ Roosevelt's grudging acceptance of Hay's initial arbitratative idea could be put into effect because Lansdowne was willing to cooperate and because Hay had used his influence to grease the skids for peaceful diplomacy.

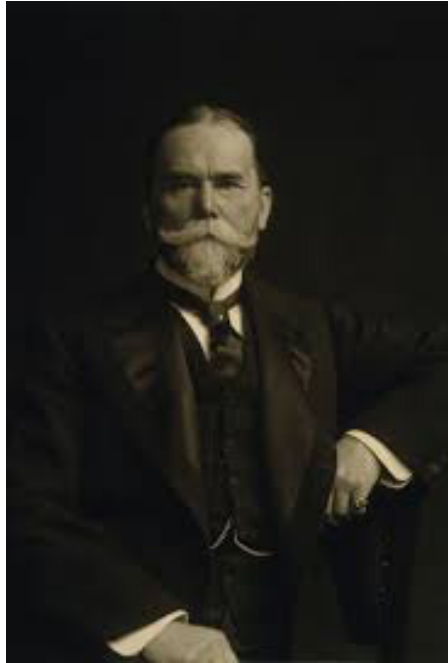
The Alaskan issue was primarily seen as one between Britain and America, not as one between British Canada and America or some combination of the three. Hay, in predictable if absurd Anglophilic fashion, wished to see only one American on the commission of six jurists. Herbert wished to see three Americans and three Britons, leaving out any Canadians.³⁶ This was no small source of friction between Canada and her imperial motherland. Laurier, in January 1903, once again publicly criticized the Americans for their position and actions regarding the Alaska treaty. He would have rather had the issue submitted to The Hague than to what he increasingly saw as a clearly biased

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Anglo-American old boys' club.³⁷

Herbert and some British diplomats began to dream of some sort of Anglo-American supreme court, while other elder British statesmen were more cautious of the Americans.³⁸ But Herbert, Hay, and Lansdowne were the central players in the Alaskan boundary issue, and their wish for Anglo-American friendship superseded Roosevelt's demand of the satisfaction of American interests on one hand and British colonial relations on the other. In Canada, Minto and Laurier recognized their helplessness and on January 21 assented to a tribunal of six impartial jurists. Two days later, King Edward VII gave his blessing.³⁹

In the U.S., representatives from the northwestern states put up a fight. They believed that ceding to Canada what was not Canada's would endanger their own states; they asserted that there were no legal grounds on which the Canadians could stand



Secretary of State John Hay, c. 1904.

The unsung hero of the Anglo-American relationship, but to Roosevelt,
“not to be trusted on issues concerning England” and
“foolishly distrustful of the Germans.”

and that even deigning to arbitrate was a farce on the part of the United States. Those Americans who favored the arbitration declared that no matter what the tribunal said, no territory would be lost to Canada. Despite the protestations of the Northwest (whose states were the most anti-Canadian of all) and the constant, truculent “pro-Americanism” of the president, the treaty passed the Senate on February 11 and cleared the path for negotiations to take place.⁴⁰

The international table was set for the pacification of the Alaskan issue. Hay, Herbert, and Lansdowne had ensured Anglo-American friendship, and the Canadians’ complaints seemed to have been sacrificed for the sake of placating the Americans. Even so, Theodore Roosevelt and his pro-Americanism found a way to make trouble. On February 18, 1903, Roosevelt appointed three of the most grossly biased politicians in all America as his “impartial” jurists: Secretary of War (and longtime Roosevelt man) Elihu Root; Senator George Turner of the anti-Canadian state of Washington; and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, progenitor of the “Large Policy” and Roosevelt’s most steadfast political partner.⁴¹ When the inevitable outrage came, the pathetic American excuse was that three unbiased judges could not be found. This, of course, did little to quell the anger.⁴² Herbert declared himself severely disheartened and disillusioned with the Americans.⁴³

Lansdowne was disappointed but still hoped for accommodation over anger. Britain had just terminated its involvement in the Anglo-German blockade of Venezuela on February 14, and the blockade had caused Roosevelt’s animal Americanism to come frightfully to the fore. The president—perhaps by coincidence, but more likely not—had ordered the admiral of the navy to practice naval maneuvers on what was then the largest scale in American history in the same theater as the Anglo-German blockade.⁴⁴ Now was simply not the time for the British to anger the rough-riding Roosevelt. Herbert, too, fully comprehended the strength of American feeling about what

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was seen as Britain's bad faith. He sent notes on February 23 to Ottawa and London urging amicability and a quick conclusion.⁴⁵ The will of the Canadians would not be allowed to obstruct the rapprochement of the English and the Americans.

The Canadians, angered at once by the Americans for their preposterous choice of "impartial" jurists and by the British for their appeasement of Roosevelt's bullish Americanism, "felt called upon not only to express their dissatisfaction at the recent exchange of ratifications at Washington before their official consent had been given, but practically to indicate that their assent had been rendered unavoidable by His Majesty's Government."⁴⁶ Lansdowne, struggling between the rock of Anglo-American amity and its import and the hard place of Britain's colonial obligations, was forced to ask the Americans for two delays in the tribunal to allow the Canadians to gather the necessary documents. Hay was also trying to reconcile his own intense, fundamental affinity for the British with the fact that he was the secretary of state of the United States of America. Hay expressed disappointment at what he saw as stalling tactics. Roosevelt asserted to Hay a duty:

If the English decline to come to an agreement this fall, under any pretense, I shall feel that it is simply due to bad faith—that they have no sincere desire to settle the matter equitably. I think they ought to be made to understand that there must be no delay; that we have come to a definite agreement with them and that the agreement must be kept on their side as well as on ours, and that we shall expect them to live up to it without fail...I shall probably, if they fail to come to an agreement, *recite our case in the message to Congress and ask for an appropriation so that we may run the line ourselves.*⁴⁷

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Yet Hay was not the only member of the American foreign policy establishment to receive word from Roosevelt in these terms. On June 29, Roosevelt wrote Lodge to say that, if the British continued to make things difficult, he would “declare the negotiations off, recite our case in the message to Congress, and ask for an appropriation to run the boundary as we deem it should be run.”⁴⁸ To Hay on July 29, he stated that “if we can’t come to an agreement now nothing will be left but to act in a way which will necessarily wound British pride.”⁴⁹ To Root on August 20, Roosevelt expressed his hope that the “the British will see reason. If they do not, it will be unpleasant for us, but it will be far more unpleasant for Great Britain and Canada.”⁵⁰ To Hay on September 21, Roosevelt stated that he was wondering

if the Jacks realize that...it will be far more unpleasant to them, if they force the alternative upon us; if we simply announce that the country is ours and will remain so, and that so far as it has not been reduced to possession it will be reduced to possession, and that no further negotiations in the matter will be entertained.⁵¹

Other letters of Roosevelt’s indicate even more explicitly his proclivity to use state force to resolve the issue. To Henry White on September 26, Roosevelt wrote that

I should be obliged to treat the territory as ours, as being for the most part in our possession, and the remainder to be reduced to possession as soon as in our judgment it was advisable—and to declare furthermore that no additional negotiations of any kind would be entered into.⁵²

To Elihu Root on August 8, the president wrote how he “shall at once establish posts on the islands and sufficiently far up the

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main streams to reduce at all the essential points our claim to actual occupancy...This will not be pleasant to do and it will be still less pleasant for the English.”⁵³ To Frederick Jackson Turner on August 8, he stated that in case of “captious objections on the part of the English, I am going to send a brigade of American regulars up to Skagway and take possession of the disputed territory and hold it by all the power and force of the United States.”⁵⁴

Roosevelt was playing fast and loose, and the British saw that he would risk severely harming the budding relationship between England and America for the sake of a small strip of land in a barely inhabitable area bearing trace amounts of gold. Fortunately for the sake of smooth Anglo-American relations at this critical stage, Hay and the British statesmen kept cool heads and paved the way for London and Washington to get



Theodore Roosevelt in his presidential years.

A pugnacious pro-American: “I am going to send a brigade of American regulars up to Skagway and take possession of the disputed territory and hold it by all the power and force of the United States.”

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along. Joseph Chamberlain, then British secretary of state for the colonies, had been spooked enough by Roosevelt. He too resolved to quickly settle the Alaskan issue no matter the cost to Canada and the empire.⁵⁵

The negotiations began in September. According to Lord Alverstone, the British representative at the tribunal, the Americans behaved badly, but he wished to put up a fight. On several issues concerning the dispute he remained unwaveringly set against all that the United States wished to do. An abrupt turnaround in early October was likely the result of pressure from Lansdowne (who was in turn feeling pressure from Roosevelt) toward conciliation on the part of the British.⁵⁶ The Americans came out with a total victory; Roosevelt and the three jurists were met with wide acclaim for what was seen as an enormous diplomatic win. The Canadians were fittingly resentful and knew that all injuries to Canada were being sustained for the sake of British friendship with America.⁵⁷

But it was Hay, not Roosevelt, who worked for diplomacy surrounding the Canada issue. It is difficult to imagine a scenario where Anglo-American amity would have remained on a smoothly upward ascent without Secretary Hay tempering the Roosevelt administration's response. Roosevelt's truculence, in actual fact, threatened significant setbacks to Anglo-American amity on multiple occasions; it brought Lansdowne and his enormously conciliatory attitude to his wit's end. Hay's Anglophilia and Lansdowne's determination to end Britain's "splendid isolation" were the determining factors that allowed the Anglo-American understanding to progress despite the Alaskan boundary conflict. Roosevelt was, realistically, a liability throughout the resolution of this dispute.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Roosevelt and Hay's respective roles in the Alaskan crisis should bring the historical consensus regarding Roosevelt's

relationship with Britain under much harsher scrutiny. Yet a far more thorough analysis of the diplomatic episodes throughout Roosevelt's career is needed to establish precisely when Roosevelt became more disposed to treating the Anglo-American entente as a serious diplomatic goal. These analyses must rely on explorations of the attitudes of Roosevelt's fellow American diplomats and policymakers, as the Alaskan boundary case shows that perhaps *they* were the authors of the Anglo-American rapprochement that undeniably took place between 1895 and 1917. (Tantalizing leads for such an analysis exist: Roosevelt left much of his East Asian diplomacy to Secretary Hay until his death in 1905, and Hay, in a remarkable suspension of logic fitting only the most ferocious of Anglophiles, attempted to blame the Russo-Japanese conflict on *Germany*, then clearly Britain's nemesis. Roosevelt, on the other hand, at one point attempted to blame Japanese aggression on *Britain*, also a plain twist of the reality on the ground.) In any case, a fuller exposition of Roosevelt's potentially more neutral attitude toward Britain—as opposed to the palpable Anglophilia of other Republicans of his time, like that of John Hay, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and Henry White—must explain the fact that Roosevelt seemed to favor Britain in his later diplomacy.

The Alaskan boundary dispute does not conclude the inquiry into Teddy Roosevelt's views on Great Britain or the evolution of those views, but it does destabilize the historiographical consensus that Roosevelt was, in his personal thought, a friend to Britain—or that he had become a friend to Britain by 1898. That others in the Republican Party of Roosevelt's time—most importantly, Secretary of State John Hay—were indeed Anglophilic has created the illusion that Roosevelt himself was pro-Britain, whereas, in fact, until at least the early 1900s, Roosevelt was in fact something of a practical (if absurdly feisty) “pro-American” situated in a largely pro-Britain party and administration. Secretary Hay, in the case of the Alaskan boundary, was not tightly managed by Roosevelt with regard to diplomatic actions and, as illustrated above, would sometimes

go against the wishes of his president. Despite Roosevelt later denying that Hay was a major player in the boundary dispute, it was indeed Hay who curbed Roosevelt's dangerous influence on the situation, made the necessary diplomatic maneuvers, took advantage of the British retreat from "splendid isolation," and allowed the conflict to come to its peaceful resolution.

The case study above has implications for the debate that runs through the literature on the appropriate characterization of Roosevelt's foreign policy in the grandest sense. Some scholars, most famously Henry Kissinger, have argued that Theodore Roosevelt can be most accurately be described as an American realpolitiker, always thinking systemically and globally while at the same time remaining conscious of the balance of power.⁵⁸ Historian Walter McDougall also projects some degree of realism and balance-consciousness onto Roosevelt, although McDougall's narrative is far more nuanced than Kissinger's and is informed by the fact that the extant "Progressivism" at the turn of the century was a fundamental aspect of the Rooseveltian worldview.⁵⁹ Howard Beale also portrays Roosevelt as seeing the world chiefly through the lens of power.⁶⁰ Others have disagreed sharply with the realist school of analysis. Frank Ninkovich in his book *American Imperialism* argues that a structural, cultural, and intellectual moment was the plinth upon which American expansion in the Edwardian era stood, while William C. Widenor and John Milton Cooper Jr. have in tandem argued that Roosevelt and Lodge were in fact *more* idealistic than Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan, due to the "Large Policy" group's Lamarckian and neo-Darwinian assumptions, their (arguably) more overt racial paternalism, and their near-worship of the militaristic spirit.⁶¹

The clearest example of the anti-realist view of Roosevelt's foreign policy is Frank Ninkovich's article "Theodore Roosevelt: Civilization as Ideology," where Ninkovich asserts that Roosevelt's diplomatic thought and behavior was driven *primarily* and *fundamentally* by an idealization of "civilization"

informed by a “metahistorical outlook” of a sort of souped-up Whig history.⁶² Citing Roosevelt’s praise of imperialism, his efforts to form diplomatic ties with European nations, and his tendency to try to be on the “civilized” side of conflicts abroad, Ninkovich portrays Roosevelt as a blind ideologue, one who saw himself as having, above all else, a “duty upon the civilized races to transplant the seeds of civilization where they had failed to germinate of their own accord.”⁶³

Ninkovich’s article is unconvincing. A disproportionately large amount of the primary source material used by Ninkovich to create his narrative is made up of letters to high-ranking foreign officials, texts of public speeches, or articles in widely circulated magazines—all discursive scenarios in which any president or diplomat might justify his actions in the most high-minded light. While Ninkovich’s argument in *American Imperialism*, which places Roosevelt’s actions in their proper intellectual and cultural context, is a welcome tonic to Kissinger’s retrojection of later-twentieth century American realism onto Roosevelt, his selective and tenuous material for “Civilization as Ideology” causes him to miss the mark. Ninkovich’s “civilizational” framework is excellent for Roosevelt’s approach to, for example, Latin America, but is unequipped to handle the looming and central diplomatic question of Roosevelt’s presidency: how the United States should navigate the increasingly dire Anglo-German rivalry. It is no wonder that Ninkovich’s article only dares to approach the question of Roosevelt’s ideas on U.S.-German relations after the point that the German war machine brutalized Belgium, five years *after* Roosevelt had left office.⁶⁴

The Alaskan boundary issue seems to show that Roosevelt’s self-proclaimed “pro-Americanism” manifested itself as a short-term explosiveness, inimical both to calculated, systematic, balance-of-power realism and to high-minded normative ideas of “civilization.” Roosevelt’s actions, when examined closely, cannot fit on any facile midpoint between the two. Furthermore, it seems that the steady hands in American

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foreign policy were in Roosevelt's *administration*. The emphasis ought to be taken away from Roosevelt the man, and a responsible evaluation of U.S. diplomacy from 1901 to 1909 should not attribute successes blindly to the president but rather take into account the efforts of Hay, White, Root, and others who worked to set policy and tame the wild man in the White House.

The question of Roosevelt's role in the informal, loose drawing together of the United States and Britain also engages a hotly debated topic in the theory of international relations: the degree to which leadership matters in statecraft and diplomacy. Most in the field of international relations implicitly or explicitly work with the idea that looking at structural, impersonal forces, along with culture, bureaucracy, and political systems, is the appropriate method by which to understand diplomacy and history. This is not an uncontested idea: Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, for example, have asserted that even small idiosyncrasies of leaders can have a profound impact on the course of history—that the human element is a significant variable. They defend their thesis on a theoretical level, positing that state intentions—often tied up with specific leaders' intentions—are germane to theories of international relations; they ground their idea in case studies as well.⁶⁵

Within the debate of leadership vs. structural causes in international relations theory, Robert Jervis engages with the tension between leaders and advisors. Jervis argues that political *role* can be a determinative force in the intentions of different actors, though Jervis himself is somewhat ambivalent about the extent to which structural forces dominate personal forces in statecraft.⁶⁶ The president, Jervis's argument goes, will face *political* pressures, while a secretary of state like Hay will be freer of electoral constraints. Jervis's thesis is a powerful explanation of the dynamics of the Roosevelt administration during the Alaskan boundary crisis. Yet Roosevelt's personality—along with the residue of his previous tepidness regarding Britain—most certainly was a factor in how he behaved, in addition to the

presidential pressure he faced. Similarly, Hay's well-documented Anglophilia was a factor in his comportment along with his position at the State Department.

Even if structural factors were among the ultimate causes of the Anglo-American rapprochement, to ignore the role of leaders—especially particularly influential ones, like Theodore Roosevelt, John Hay, or Lansdowne—is dangerous and reductive.⁶⁷ Matters of international relations and diplomatic history are too complex to focus only on any one element; biography and psychology must be explored as much as political systems and international structures. The historiography on Theodore Roosevelt's own tastes and predilections regarding diplomacy has crucially ignored evidence of his own ambivalent-at-best attitude toward Great Britain, and Roosevelt's very persona is far from unimportant in this analysis. The Anglo-American entente steadied both nations before the coming collapse of world order, and the causes of that entente—not only those distal and impersonal, but also those proximate and personal—deserve painstaking attention.

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NOTES

¹ Theodore Roosevelt to the Editors of *The Harvard Crimson*, January 7, 1896.

² Frederick W. Marks III, *Velvet on Iron: The Diplomacy of Theodore Roosevelt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 2–3.

³ William N. Tilchin, *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire: A Study in Presidential Statecraft* (New York: St. Martins, 1997).

⁴ Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (New York: Collier Books, 1973).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 85–158.

⁷ See Walter L. Arnstein, *Britain Yesterday and Today: 1830 to the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 248–249.

⁸ Nelson Manfred Blake, in his 1955 article “Ambassadors at the Court of Theodore Roosevelt,” deals with this issue imaginatively and succinctly. Blake analyzes Roosevelt’s relationships with the ambassadors to Washington from influential nations and stresses the import of these friendships in an era of personal diplomacy. Roosevelt had a favorite British diplomat whom he attempted to secure as British ambassador to Washington and failed (Cecil Spring-Rice), and a favorite German diplomat whom he succeeded in securing as ambassador (Baron Speck von Sternberg). Overall, Roosevelt had relatively cold relationships with the British ambassadors. The French ambassador, a scholarly and well-raised gentleman named Jules Jusserand, was most certainly Roosevelt’s favorite. The attitude Roosevelt took toward his ambassadorial court was often determined by how well the men could perform to the president’s tastes, from dinner-table discussions revolving around classical history and mythology to tennis to vigorous (and often dangerous) hiking around the Potomac valley. Blake argues that these relationships had an intelligible and material influence on the diplomatic actions of Roosevelt and his administration. See Nelson Manfred Blake, “Ambassadors at the Court of Theodore Roosevelt” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42, no. 2 (1955): 179–206.

⁹ Charles S. Campbell Jr., *Anglo-American Understanding, 1898-1903* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957).

¹⁰ Campbell Jr.’s *Anglo-American Understanding*, while assuming a defensible historical framework and avoiding the temptation to lionize Roosevelt, nonetheless is not an analysis of Roosevelt’s actions; rather, it features Roosevelt as a supporting character in the genesis of the entente. Campbell’s analysis of Roosevelt and his relationship to the Anglo-American “understanding” is not developed as a subject of its own and is instead sprinkled throughout the book.

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¹¹ For secondary source discussions of the Enlightenment's racist innovations that continued to shape metropolitan assumptions about the world through the subsequent centuries, see Paul Bowles, "John Millar, the Four-Stages Theory, and Women's Position in Society," *History of Political Economy* 16, no. 4 (1984): 619–638; P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London, 1982); Thomas Strack, "Philosophical Anthropology on the Eve of Biological Determinism: Immanuel Kant and George Forster on the Moral Qualities and Biological Characteristics of the Human Race," *Central European History* 29, no. 3 (1996): 285–308. For discussions of how these sorts of cultural and social assumptions undergirded and perhaps, in part, instigated imperial expansion by the U.S. and Britain, see Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), especially pp. 9–89, and Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), respectively.

¹² Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism*, 9–90.

¹³ For the best and most thorough discussion, see Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement* (New York: Atheneum, 1968) 119–155.

¹⁴ Beale, *Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*, 96.

¹⁵ Roosevelt to Lodge, May 21, 1895

¹⁶ Roosevelt to Lodge, December 20, 1895.

¹⁷ Evan Thomas, *The War Lovers* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2010), 68.

¹⁸ Iestyn Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 83. While Iestyn Adams makes several points that contradict Marks, Beale, Tilchin, and the general consensus on Roosevelt's attitude toward Great Britain, Adams's book is not part of the Roosevelt historiography. *Brothers Across the Ocean* is a dissertation on the international policies of Lord Lansdowne; his exposition of Roosevelt, however, deserves to come into full contact with the work of Roosevelt scholars.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁰ The treaty was originally between Russia and England; the United States inherited the Russian side of the treaty in the 1867 Alaska purchase.

²¹ Charles, *Anglo-American Understanding*, 67–68.

²² *Ibid.*, 94.

²³ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 95–96

²⁵ Kenton J. Clymer, *John Hay: The Gentleman as Diplomat* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975), 166. When, during the second Boer War, a group of Boer delegates visited Washington to speak with the U.S. secretary of state, Hay received the delegation with an air of contempt, spat out a prepared statement rejecting their plea for American mediation, shooed them

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out of his office, and promptly ushered the British ambassador into his door within their sight.

²⁶ Ibid., 166–167.

²⁷ Roosevelt to Lodge, January 28, 1909.

²⁸ Sir Francis Villiers to the British Colonial Office, September 19, 1901. Despite his letter, the negotiations were interdependent.

²⁹ Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 97.

³⁰ Ibid., 97–98; British Colonial Office to British Foreign Office, January 4, 1902.

³¹ Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 98; Pauncefote to Lansdowne, confidential, March 28, 1902.

³² Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 99; Raikes to Lansdowne, May 23, 1902.

³³ Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 100–101.

³⁴ A previous joint-high commission that intermittently worked to solve the issues between British Canada and the United States had collapsed after a brief effort to solve the Alaska-Canada boundary dispute. John Hay, then secretary of state under William McKinley, took it upon himself to institute a stopgap settlement in areas around the Klondike to ward off conflict arising between Canadian and American authorities. See Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement*, 164.

³⁵ Ibid.; Minto to Chamberlain, November 18, 1902.

³⁶ Herbert to Lansdowne, confidential, December 9, 1902.

³⁷ Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 103.

³⁸ Ibid., 102–103.

³⁹ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁴¹ Lodge had previously spoken out against Canada's even having a contention. See Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 107.

⁴² Ibid., 107; "The Alaska Boundary" *The Manchester Guardian*, February 26, 1903, 5.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001), 180.

⁴⁵ Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 109.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 111; Minto to Chamberlain, confidential, March 9, 1903.

⁴⁷ Roosevelt to Hay, July 29, 1903 (emphasis added).

⁴⁸ Roosevelt to Lodge, June 29, 1903

⁴⁹ Roosevelt to Hay, July 29, 1903

⁵⁰ Roosevelt to Root, August 20, 1903

⁵¹ Roosevelt to Hay, September 21, 1903

⁵² Roosevelt to White, September 26, 1903

⁵³ Roosevelt to Root, August 8, 1903

⁵⁴ See Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding*, 327–328; Roosevelt to Turner,

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August 8, 1903.

⁵⁵ Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean*, 114.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 118.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 119–121.

⁵⁸ Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 247–256.

⁵⁹ Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1997), 101–121.

⁶⁰ Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 383.

⁶¹ See William C. Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 205, 254–60; John Milton Cooper Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 313–323.

⁶² Frank Ninkovich, “Theodore Roosevelt: Civilization as Ideology” *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 3 (1986): 221–245.

⁶³ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 242.

⁶⁵ Byman, Daniel L., and Kenneth M. Pollack. “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back in,” *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–146.

⁶⁶ Jervis, Robert. “Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?” *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 153–179.

⁶⁷ Eric Hobsbawm and Immanuel Wallerstein, historians of “structure” and bigger-picture movements and trends in this era, have next to nothing to say about the Anglo-German-American triangle of diplomacy in the decades leading up to the First World War, although Wallerstein has stated his intent to engage with it in the forthcoming fifth volume of his world-systems analysis.

Images

Page 110: “Lynn canal and the Skagway river,” *Popular Science Monthly* Volume 55, 1899, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PSM_V55_D013_Lynn_canal_and_the_skagway_river.png (accessed May 5, 2017).

Page 114: “John Hay,” C.M. Gilbert, c. 1904, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C.M._Gilbert._John_Hay,_c._1904.jpg (accessed May 5, 2017).

Page 118: “Theodore Roosevelt,” Harris and Ewing, c. 1901–1908, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theodore_Roosevelt_1901-08.jpg (accessed May 5, 2017).